

Historic Resources Inventory – Essential Properties

Joseph L. Fisher (Arlington) U.S. Post Office

Address:

3118 Washington Blvd.

RPC #:

19006193

Current Owner(s):

United States Postal Services
4301 Wilson Blvd., #300
Arlington, VA 22203

Building Date: 1937

Current Zoning: C-R

Existing Protections: Arlington County Local Historic District

Current Development Pressure: None

Historic Designations:

Renovated 2005
National Register Historic District, 1986
Virginia Landmarks Register, 1985
Arlington County Local Historic District, 1984

Significance Highlights:

1. First Federal building built in Arlington; and
2. Remaining product of vanishing record of Federal New Deal Program architecture.

Significance Statement:

The Arlington Post Office, built in 1937, is an excellent example of modern interpretation of the Georgian Revival style. As the first federal building built in Arlington County, it provided a focal point for establishing the identity of Arlington. The post office represented an important milestone in the development of Arlington from an agglomeration of disparate suburban villages to the community it is today. The Arlington Post Office is a one-story Georgian Revival-style building, which in form and detailing is unusual for post office construction in the 1930s.

Although inspired by early American architecture, the post offices detailing is simplified and stylized in a manner typical of the period. The building possesses a dignified, institutional presence often lacking in other contemporary post offices. The Palladian, geometric aspects of the Georgian Revival architecture incorporated in the design of the post office lend it a greater dignity and presence than other contemporary post offices that rely on domestic scale and ornamentation for stylistic identification.

The Arlington Post Office was listed in the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C. The post office, a visual landmark for county residents, is a Local Historic District. The Arlington Post Office meets Criterion A because of the role it played in the formation of a single Arlington identity for the communities located within the county boundary. Clarendon, the commercial center of the county, grew because of the post office's location within the confines of this once residential subdivision. The post office meets Criterion C because it is an excellent example of the Georgian Revival style adapted to a modern aesthetic. Both the quality and subject matter of the interior murals further enhance the unifying civic function of the building.

In 2000 the Arlington Post Office was renamed the Joseph L. Fisher Post Office. Joseph Fisher was a U.S. Representative from the 10th District of Virginia.

Summary Description:

As described in the 1985 National Register nomination, the Arlington Post Office is a one-story brick building constructed over a full basement. Brick is laid with a grapevine mortar joint in modified five-course American bond. The building is pentagonal in plan with the main entrance, at the center of a wall, facing northwest onto the intersection of Washington Boulevard and North Hudson Street. This entrance centers the primary façade, which is three bays wide. The detailing of the primary façade is returned for one bay on each of the adjacent facades along Washington Boulevard and North Hudson Street to create a frontispiece for the building. The primary façade is comprised of a domed portico flanked by two tripartite windows inset within arches. The central window within each opening is six-over-six; the narrower windows are two-over-two. Simple Doric limestone pilasters form the window surrounds. The arched area above the entablature is finished with stucco. A rubbed brick belt course ornaments the frontispiece at the spring of the arches. A simple limestone entablature and projecting cornice extends around this portion of the building and the dome, unifying the architectural composition.

The dome, which rises above the flat roof of the building, is supported by four fluted limestone piers. Three granite steps form the foundation of the portico. Incised block lettering spells out "UNITED STATES POST OFFICE" within the frieze of the dome. The copper dome, originally covered with gold leaf, is not painted a stucco color. The entrance to the building is recessed within the cylindrical volume created by the portico. The wood and glass entry vestibule extends

only to the height of the belt course. Side lights flank recent aluminum and glass doors that are topped by a four-light transom. A Greek key entablature surmounts the vestibule.

The Washington Boulevard and North Hudson Street facades beyond the return within the frontispiece are detailed in a more utilitarian manner. The openings in these side facades consist of single-hung, six-over-six inset windows. The surrounds consist of brick laid in header bond. The slate roofs above these portions of the façade, which are lower than the frontispiece, are hipped. The two remaining facades comprise the rear of the post office, which now abuts a 2007 office building.

The siting of the building as noted in the National Register nomination is especially noteworthy. The triangular site created by the acute angle of the intersection of north Hudson Street and Washington Boulevard places special demands on the building that occupies it. The designers of the post office chose to make the building face the point of the triangle at the intersection rather than face either street. The angular massing of the building is further emphasized by the portico, landscaping, and original flagpole at the front of the building. A dynamic of radial expansion is established that extends from the flagpole to the portico, to the northwest façade, and finally encompasses the post office itself.

Two notable features within the lobby are the light fixtures and the murals. The light fixtures consist of "Saturn" globes suspended from the ceiling. Thin anodized aluminum rims decorated with stars encircle white glass globes. The murals are placed in the plaster area above the marble walls, below the frieze. The panels depict Indians on Analostan Island, Captain John Smith and the Indians, tobacco picking by the Lee Mansion, Robert E. Lee receiving his Confederate commission in Richmond, a picnic at Great Falls, polo players at Fort Myers, and a contemporary harvest at an apple orchard.